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Trumpism

Trumpism (also referred to as the **Make America Great Again movement** or **MAGA** for short) is a political movement in the United States that comprises the political ideologies associated with U.S. President Donald Trump and his political base.[7][8] It incorporates ideologies such as right-wing populism, right-wing antiglobalism, national conservatism, and neo-nationalism, and features significant illiberal, authoritarian and at times autocratic beliefs.[a][9][10][11][12] *Trumpists* and *Trumpians* are terms that refer to individuals exhibiting its characteristics. There is significant academic debate over the prevalence of neo-fascist[b][13][14][15][27][note 3] elements of Trumpism.

Trumpism	
***De facto* leader**	Donald Trump
Founded	2015
Membership	Republican Party
Ideology	Right-wing populism National conservatism American nationalism Authoritarian conservatism Fascism (Disputed) **Factions:** Conservative Libertarianism Christian right
Political position	Far-right
Colors	Red
Slogan	Make America Great Again
Politics of United States · Political parties · Elections	

Trumpism is associated with the belief that the President is above the rule of law.[28][29][30][31] It has been referred to as an American political variant of the far-right[32][33] and the national-populist and neo-nationalist sentiment seen in multiple nations starting in the mid-late 2010s.[34] Trump's political base has been compared to a cult of personality.[c] Trump supporters became the largest faction of the United States Republican Party, with the remainder often characterized as "the elite", "the establishment" or "Republican in name only" (RINO) in contrast. In response to the rise of Trump, there has arisen a Never Trump movement.

The label *Trumpism* has been applied to national-conservative and national-populist movements in other democracies. Politicians labeled as Trumpist by news agencies include Nigel Farage of the United Kingdom, Jair Bolsonaro of Brazil, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan of Turkey, Viktor Orbán of Hungary, Rodrigo Duterte and Bongbong Marcos of the Philippines, Shinzo Abe of Japan, Vladimir Putin of Russia, Yoon Suk Yeol of South Korea, Javier Milei of Argentina, Alexander Lukashenko of Belarus, and Prabowo Subianto of Indonesia.

Themes

Trumpism emerged during Trump's 2016 presidential campaign. Trump's rhetoric has its roots in a populist political method that suggests nationalistic answers to political, economic, and social problems.[46][47][48] They are more specifically described as right-wing populist.[49][50] Policies include immigration restrictionism, trade protectionism, isolationism, and opposition to entitlement reform.[51]

Clockwise from top:
Donald Trump 2020 presidential campaign rally in Greenville, North Carolina; Donald Trump at a 2016 rally in Arizona; armed supporters of Trump at a Minnesota demonstration, September 2020;[note 1] a supporter kneeling at a 2016 Trump rally in Tucson; a supporter holding a sign that reads, "Fuck your feelings!" at a rally in 2019; Trump supporters storming the Capitol Building on January 6, 2021[note 2]

Former National Security Advisor and close Trump advisor John Bolton disputes that *Trumpism* exists in any meaningful sense, adding that "[t]he man does not have a philosophy. And people can try and draw lines between the dots of his decisions. They will fail."[52] Writing for the *Routledge Handbook of Global Populism* (2019), Olivier Jutel notes, "What Donald Trump reveals is that the various iterations of right-wing American populism have less to do with a programmatic social conservatism or libertarian economics than with enjoyment."[53]

Trump has been described a demagogue, and there exists significant scholarly study over the use of demagogy and related themes within Trumpism.[54] Trump explicitly and routinely disparages racial, religious, and ethnic minorities,[55] and scholars consistently find that racial animus regarding blacks, immigrants, and Muslims are the best predictors of support for Trump.[56] Trumpist rhetoric heavily features anti-immigrant,[57] xenophobic,[58] nativist,[59] and racist attacks against minority groups.[60][61] Other identified aspects include conspiracist,[62][63] isolationist,[59][64] Christian nationalist,[65] evangelical Christian,[66] protectionist,[67][68] anti-feminist,[69][70] and anti-LGBT[71] beliefs.

Grievance

Sociologist Michael Kimmel states that Trump's populism is "an emotion. And the emotion is righteous indignation that the government is screwing 'us'".[72] Kimmel posits that Trump manifests "aggrieved entitlement,"[73] a "sense that those benefits to which you believed yourself entitled have been snatched away from you by unseen forces larger and more powerful. You feel yourself to be the heir to a great promise, the American Dream, which has turned into an impossible fantasy ..."[74]

Vagueness

Communications scholar Zizi Papacharissi explains the utility of being ideologically vague, and using terms and slogans that can mean anything the supporter wants them to mean. "When these publics thrive in affective engagement it's because they've found an affective hook that's built around an open signifier that they get to use and reuse and re-employ ... MAGA; that's an open signifier ... it allows them all to assign different meanings to it. So MAGA works for connecting publics that are different, because it is open enough to permit people to ascribe their own meaning to it."[75][note 4]

Exit polling data suggests the campaign was successful at mobilizing the "white disenfranchised",[76] the lower- to working-class European-Americans who are experiencing growing social inequality and who often have stated opposition to the American political establishment.[77][78]

Some prominent conservatives formed a Never Trump movement, seen as a rebellion of conservative elites against the base.[79][80][81][82]

Right-wing authoritarian populism

Former Chief Strategist for the first Trump Administration Steve Bannon supported many national populist political movements including creating a network of far-right groups in Europe.

Trumpism has been described as right-wing authoritarian populist,[83] and is broadly seen among scholars as posing an existential threat to American democracy.[84] His presidency sparked renewed focus and research on restraining presidential power and the threats of a criminal presidency that had died down since the Nixon administration.[85] Trump advocated for an extreme position of unitary executive theory, arguing that Article II gave him the right to "do whatever I want". The theory is a maximalist interpretation of presidential power formulated during the Reagan administration and pushed by the Federalist Society to undo post-Nixon reforms. Future presidents ran with "unitary-adjacent ideas" and aspects of theory held bipartisan support as part of the growing powers of the presidency.[86] In February 2025, Trump wrote and pinned a comment on Truth Social and X: "He who saves his Country does not violate any Law", which the White House later reposted on X that day. The phrase itself is a variation of one attributed to Napoleon Bonaparte, and was noted to be in line with his administration's aggressive push for expanding presidential power under the theory.[87][88]

Yale sociologist Philip S. Gorski warned against the threat of Trumpism, writing that

> "the election of Donald Trump constitutes perhaps the greatest threat to American democracy since the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. There is a real and growing danger that representative government will be slowly but effectively supplanted by a populist form of authoritarian rule in the years to come. Media intimidation, mass propaganda, voter suppression, court packing, and even armed paramilitaries—many of the necessary and sufficient conditions for an authoritarian devolution are gradually falling into place."[89]

Some academics regard such authoritarian backlash as a feature of liberal democracies.[90] Disputing the view that the surge of support for Trumpism and Brexit is a new phenomenon, political scientist Karen Stenner and social psychologist Jonathan Haidt state that

> the far-right populist wave ... did not in fact come out of nowhere. It is not a sudden madness, or virus, or tide, or even just a copycat phenomenon—the emboldening of bigots and despots by others' electoral successes. Rather, it is something that sits just beneath the surface of any human society—including in the advanced liberal democracies at the heart of the Western world—and can be activated by core elements of liberal democracy itself.

Stenner and Haidt regard authoritarian waves as a feature of liberal democracies noting that the findings of their 2016 study of Trump and Brexit supporters was not unexpected, as they wrote:

> ... normative threat tends either to leave non-authoritarians utterly unmoved by the things that catalyze authoritarians or to propel them toward being (what one might conceive as) their 'best selves.' In previous investigations, this has seen non-authoritarians move toward positions of greater tolerance and respect for diversity under the very conditions that seem to propel authoritarians toward increasing intolerance.[90]

Author and authoritarianism critic Masha Gessen contrasted the "democratic" strategy of the Republican establishment making policy arguments appealing to the public, with the "autocratic" strategy of appealing to an "audience of one" in Donald Trump.[91] Gessen noted the fear of Republicans that Trump would endorse a primary election opponent or otherwise use his political power to undermine any fellow party members that he felt had betrayed him.

The 2020 Republican Party platform simply endorsed "the President's America-first agenda", prompting comparisons to contemporary leader-focused party platforms in Russia and China.[92] In January 2025, a *CNN-SSRS* poll found that 53% of Republicans viewed loyalty to Trump as central to their political identity and very important to what being a Republican is, beating values such as "a less powerful federal government (46%), supporting congressional Republicans (42%) or opposing Democratic policies (32%)".[93]

General Mark Milley, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff under Trump, has described Trump as a "wannabe dictator."[94][95]

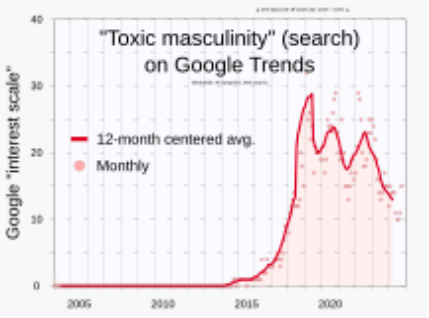
Gender and masculinity

Opposition to aspects of transgender rights is a theme of Trumpism.[96]

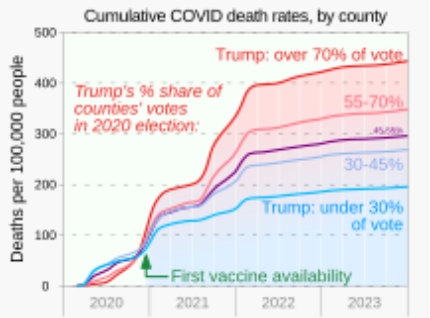
According to Philip Gorski, in Trumpian nostalgia "decline is brought about by docility and femininity and the return to greatness requires little more than a reassertion of dominance and masculinity. In this way, 'virtue' is reduced to its root etymology of manly bravado."[89] Michael Kimmel describes male Trump supporters who despaired "over whether or not anything could enable them to find a place with some dignity in this new, multicultural, and more egalitarian world. ... These men were angry, but they all looked back nostalgically to a time when their sense of masculine entitlement went unchallenged. They wanted to reclaim their country, restore their rightful place in it, and retrieve their manhood in the process."[101]

Social psychologists Theresa Vescio and Nathaniel Schermerhorn note that "In his 2016 presidential campaign, Trump embodied HM [hegemonic masculinity] while waxing nostalgic for a racially homogenous past that maintained an unequal gender order. Trump performed HM by repeatedly referencing his status as a successful businessman ("blue-collar businessman") and alluding to how tough

he would be as president. ... Trump was openly hostile toward gender-atypical women, sexualized gender typical women, and attacked the masculinity of male peers and opponents." In their studies involving 2,007 people, they found that endorsement of hegemonic masculinity better predicted support for Trump than other factors, such as support for antiestablishment, antielitist, nativist, racist, sexist, homophobic or xenophobic perspectives.[102]



Google Trends search term for "Toxic masculinity" began a substantial increase in 2016, at the time of the campaign for the U.S. presidential election.[97]



After the December 2020 introduction of COVID vaccines, a partisan gap in death rates developed, indicating the effects of vaccine skepticism.[98] As of March 2024, more than 30 percent of Republicans had not received a COVID vaccine, compared with less than 10 percent of Democrats.[98] Aversion to wearing masks has been associated with Trumpism's celebration of masculinity.[99][100]

Kimmel was surprised at the sexual turn the 2016 election took and thinks that Trump is for many men a fantasy figure, an uber-male free to indulge every desire. "Many of these guys feel that the current order of things has emasculated them, by which I mean it has taken away their ability to support a family and have great life. Here's a guy who says: 'I can build anything I want. I can do anything I want. I can have the women I want.' They're going, 'This guy is awesome!'"[103]

Neville Hoad, an expert on gender issues in South Africa, sees this as a common theme with another strongman leader, Jacob Zuma, comparing his "Zulu Big Man version of toxic masculinity versus a dog whistle white supremacist version; the putative real estate billionaire turned reality television star". Both men express a "masculinist fantasy of freedom", similar to Jacques Lacan's mythic leader of the primal horde whose power to satisfy every pleasure or whim has not been castrated. By activating such fantasies, toxic masculine behaviors from opulent displays of greed (the dream palaces of Mar-a-Lago and Nkandla), violent rhetoric, "grab them by the pussy" "locker room" "jokes" to misogynist insults, philandering, and even sexual predatory behavior including allegations of groping and raping become political assets not liabilities.[104]

Trump supporters in Manchester, New Hampshire attending a rally, August 15, 2019

Gender role scholar Colleen Clemens describes toxic masculinity as "a narrow and repressive description of manhood, designating manhood as defined by violence, sex, status and aggression ... where strength is everything while emotions are a weakness; where sex and brutality are yardsticks by which men are measured, while supposedly 'feminine' traits—which can range from emotional vulnerability to simply not being hypersexual—are the means by which your status as "man" can be taken away."[105] Writing in the *Journal of Human Rights*, Kimberly Theidon notes the COVID-19

pandemic's irony of Trumpian toxic masculinity: "Being a tough guy means wearing the mask of masculinity: Being a tough guy means refusing to don a mask that might preserve one's life and the lives of others."[100]

Tough guy bravado appeared on the internet prior to attack on Congress on January 6, 2021, with one poster writing, "Be ready to fight. Congress needs to hear glass breaking, doors being kicked in ... . Get violent. Stop calling this a march, or rally, or a protest. Go there ready for war. We get our President or we die."[106] Of the rioters arrested for the attack on the U.S. Capitol, 88% were men, and 67% were 35 years or older.[107][note 5]

Christian Trumpism

Trump has strong support among white evangelical Christians, particularly among those who do not attend church regularly.[109] Trump also maintains strong support with Christian nationalists,[110] and his rallies take on the symbols, rhetoric and agenda of Christian nationalism.[111] Trump described his 2024 presidential campaign as a "righteous crusade" against "atheists, globalists and the Marxists".[112] Many Christian Trump supporters view him as divinely ordained and "chosen by God", and some compare him to Jesus.[113][114] Trump shared and played a video titled "God Made Trump" at several of his rallies explicitly comparing him to a messianic figure in religious terms.[115] Trump is frequently described among Christian supporters as an Old Testament hero, with Cyrus the Great or David frequently mentioned. *The New York Times* describes his supporters seeing him as one of several "morally flawed figures handpicked by God to lead profound missions aimed at achieving overdue justice or resisting existential evil".[116] This framing has been described as "vessel theology" which allows for support of Trump and excuses his prior sexual misconduct and adultery.[117] Trump has strong support with members of the dominionist New Apostolic Reformation, and many Trump administration officials are aligned with the group.[118][119]

According to 2016 election exit polls, 26% of voters self identified as white evangelical Christians,[120] of whom more than three-fourths in 2017 approved of Trump's performance, most of them approving "very strongly" as reported by a Pew Research Center study.[121] In contrast, approximately two-thirds of non-white evangelicals supported Hillary Clinton in 2016, with 90% of black Protestants also voting for her even though their theological views are similar to evangelicals. According to Yale researcher Philip Gorski, "the question is not so much why evangelicals voted for Trump then—many did not—but why so many white evangelicals did." Gorski's answer was simply "because they are also white Christian nationalists and Trumpism is *inter alia* a reactionary version of white Christian nationalism."[122]

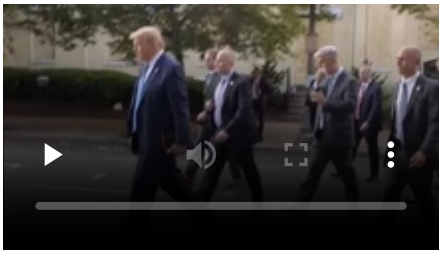
Israeli philosopher Adi Ophir sees the politics of purity in the white Christian nationalist rhetoric of evangelical supporters, such as the comparison of Nehemiah's wall around Jerusalem to Trump's wall keeping out the enemy, writing, "the notion of the enemy includes 'Mexican migrants', 'filthy' gays, and even Catholics 'led astray by Satan', and the real danger these enemies pose is degradation to a 'blessed—great— ... nation' whose God is the Lord."[123]

Theologian Michael Horton believes Christian Trumpism represents the confluence of three trends that have come together, namely Christian American exceptionalism, end-times conspiracies, and the prosperity gospel, with Christian Americanism being the narrative that God specially called the United States into being as an extraordinary if not miraculous providence and end-times conspiracy referring to the world's annihilation (figurative or literal) due to some conspiracy of nefarious groups and globalist powers

threatening American sovereignty. Horton thinks that what he calls the "cult of Christian Trumpism" blends these three ingredients with "a generous dose of hucksterism" as well as self-promotion and personality cult.[124]

Evangelical Christian and historian John Fea believes "the church has warned against the pursuit of political power for a long, long time", but that many modern-day evangelicals such as Trump advisor and televangelist Paula White ignore these admonitions. Televangelist Jim Bakker praises prosperity gospel preacher White's ability to "walk into the White House at any time she wants to" and have "full access to the King." According to Fea, there are several other "court evangelicals" who have "devoted their careers to endorsing political candidates and Supreme Court justices who will restore what they believe to be the Judeo-Christian roots of the country" and who in turn are called on by Trump to "explain to their followers why Trump can be trusted in spite of his moral failings", including James Dobson, Franklin Graham, Johnnie Moore Jr., Ralph Reed, Gary Bauer, Richard Land, megachurch pastor Mark Burns and Southern Baptist pastor and Fox political commentator Robert Jeffress.[125]

For prominent Christians who fail to support Trump, the cost is a loss of presidential access and a substantial risk of criticism, a lesson learned by Timothy Dalrymple, president of the flagship magazine of evangelicals *Christianity Today*, and former chief editor Mark Galli, who were condemned by more than two hundred evangelical leaders for co-authoring a letter arguing that Christians were obligated to support the impeachment of Trump.[126]



Donald Trump photo op at St. John's Church

Historian Stephen Jaeger traces the history of admonitions against becoming beholden religious courtiers back to the 11th century, with warnings of curses placed on holy men barred from heaven for taking too "keen an interest in the affairs of the state."[127] Dangers to the court clergy were described by Peter of Blois, a 12th-century French cleric, theologian and courtier who "knew that court life is the death of the soul"[128] and that despite believing that participation at court was "contrary to God and salvation," the clerical courtiers justified it with comparisons to Moses being sent by God to the Pharaoh.[129] Pope Pius II opposed the clergy's presence at court, believing it was difficult for a Christian courtier to "rein in ambition, suppress avarice, tame envy, strife, wrath, and cut off vice, while standing in the midst of these [very] things." The history of warnings of the corrupting influence of power on holy leaders is recounted by Fea who compares it to behavior of Trump's court evangelical leaders, warning that Christians risk "making idols out of political leaders."[130]

Jeffress claims that evangelical leaders' support of Trump is moral regardless of behavior that *Christianity Today*'s chief editor called "a near perfect example of a human being who is morally lost and confused."[132] Jeffress argues that "the godly principle here is that governments have one responsibility, and that is Romans 13 [which] says to avenge evil doers."[133] This same biblical chapter was used by Jeff Sessions to claim biblical justification for Trump's policy of separating children from immigrant families. Historian Lincoln Muller explains this is one of two types of interpretations of Romans 13 which has been used in American political debates since its founding and is on the side of "the thread of American history that justifies oppression and domination in the name of law and order."[134]

A Trump supporter carries a QAnon tagged placard with Jesus wearing a MAGA hat on January 6, 2021.[131] The sign is blurred for copyright reasons.

From Jeffress's reading, government's purpose is as a "strongman to protect its citizens against evildoers", adding: "I don't care about that candidate's tone or vocabulary, I want the meanest toughest son of a you-know-what I can find, and I believe that is biblical."[135] Jeffress, who referred to Barack Obama as "paving the way for the future reign of the Antichrist," Mitt Romney as a cult follower of a non-Christian religion[136] and Roman Catholicism as a "Satanic" result of "Babylonian mystery religion"[137] traces the Christian libertarian perspective on government's sole role to suppress evil back to Saint Augustine who argued in *The City of God against the Pagans* (426 CE) that government's role is to restrain evil so Christians can peacefully practice their beliefs. Martin Luther similarly believed that government should be limited to checking sin.[138]

External image

Same image as above, without the blurring (https://www.flickr.com/photos/37527185@N05/50826699171/)

Like Jeffress, Richard Land refused to cut ties with Trump after his reaction to the Charlottesville white supremacist rally, with the explanation that "Jesus did not turn away from those who may have seemed brash with their words or behavior," adding that "now is not the time to quit or retreat, but just the opposite—to lean in closer."[139] Johnnie Moore's explanation for refusing to repudiate Trump after his Charlottesville response was that "you only make a difference if you have a seat at the table."[140]

More combative, less ideological base

Journalist Elaina Plott suggests ideology is not as important as other characteristics of Trumpism.[note 6] Plott cites political analyst Jeff Roe, who observed Trump "understood" and acted on the trend among Republican voters to be "less ideological" but "more polarized". Republicans are now more willing to accept policies like government mandated health care coverage for pre-existing conditions or trade tariffs, formerly disdained by conservatives as burdensome government regulations. At the same time, strong avowals of support for Trump and aggressive partisanship have become part of Republican election campaigning—in at least some parts of America—reaching down even to non-partisan campaigns for local government which formerly were collegial and issue-driven.[141] Research by political scientist Marc Hetherington and others has found Trump supporters tend to share a "worldview" transcending political ideology, agreeing with statements like "the best strategy is to play hardball, even if it means being unfair." In contrast, those who agree with statements like "cooperation is the key to success" tend to prefer Trump's adversary former Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney.[141]

On January 31, 2021, a detailed overview of the attempt by combative Trump supporters to subvert the election of the United States was published in *The New York Times*.[142][143] Journalist Nicholas Lemann writes of the disconnect between some of Trump's campaign rhetoric and promises, and what he accomplished once in office—and the fact that the difference seemed to bother very few supporters. The campaign themes being anti-free-trade nationalism, defense of Social Security, attacks on big business, "building that big, beautiful wall and making Mexico pay for it", repealing Obama's Affordable Care Act, a trillion dollar infrastructure-building program. The accomplishments being "conventional" Republican policies and legislation—substantial tax cuts, rollbacks of federal regulations, and increases in military spending.[144] Many have noted that instead of the Republican National Convention issuing the customary "platform" of policies and promises for the 2020 campaign, it offered a "one-page resolution" stating that the party was not "going to have a new platform, but instead ... 'has and will continue to enthusiastically support the president's America-first agenda.'"[note 7][145]

An alternate nonideological circular definition of Trumpism widely held among Trump activists was reported by Saagar Enjeti, chief Washington correspondent for *The Hill*, who stated: "I was frequently told by people wholly within the MAGA camp that trumpism meant anything Trump does, ergo nothing that he did is a departure from trumpism."[146]

Ideological themes

Trumpism differs from classical Abraham Lincoln Republicanism in many ways regarding free trade, immigration, equality, checks and balances in federal government, and the separation of church and state.[147] Peter J. Katzenstein of the WZB Berlin Social Science Center believes that Trumpism rests on three pillars, namely nationalism, religion and race.[148] According to Jeff Goodwin, Trumpism is characterized by five key elements: social conservatism, neoliberal capitalism, economic nationalism, nativism, and white nationalism.[149]

At the 2021 CPAC conference, Trump gave his own definition of what defines Trumpism: "What it means is great deals, ... Like the USMCA replacement of the horrible NAFTA. ... It means low taxes and eliminated job killing regulations, ... It means strong borders, but people coming into our country based on a system of merit. ... [I]t means no riots in the streets. It means law enforcement. It means very strong protection for the second amendment and the right to keep and bear arms. ... [I]t means a strong military and taking care of our vets ... ."[150][151]

Methods of persuasion

Sociologist Arlie Hochschild writes that Trump's "speeches—evoking dominance, bravado, clarity, national pride, and personal uplift—inspire an emotional transformation" in followers, deeply resonating with their "emotional self-interest". Hochschild states that Trump is an "emotions candidate", appealing to the emotional self-interests of voters. To Hochschild, this explains the paradox raised by Thomas Frank's book *What's the Matter with Kansas?*, an anomaly which motivated her five-year immersive research into the emotional dynamics of the Tea Party movement which she believes has mutated into Trumpism.[152][153]

Children wearing "Make America Great Again" hats at the 2017 inauguration, a theme earlier established by Reagan to elicit a sense of restoration of hope

Her book *Strangers in Their Own Land* was named one of the "6 books to understand Trump's Win" by the *New York Times*.[154] Hochschild claims that voters were not persuaded by rhetoric to vote against their self-interest through appeals to the "bad angels" of their nature:[note 8] "their greed, selfishness, racial intolerance, homophobia, and desire to get out of paying taxes that go to the unfortunate." She grants that the appeal to bad angels is made by Trump, but states that it "obscures another—to the right wing's good angels—their patience in waiting in line in scary economic times, their capacity for loyalty, sacrifice, and endurance", qualities she describes as a part of a motivating narrative she calls their "deep story", a social contract narrative that appears to be widely shared in other countries as well.[155] She thinks Trump's approach towards his audience creates group cohesiveness by exploiting a crowd phenomenon Emile Durkheim called "collective effervescence", "a state of emotional excitation felt by those who join with others they take to be fellow members of a moral or biological tribe ... to affirm their unity and, united, they feel secure and respected."[156] [note 9]

Trumpian rhetoric employs absolutist framings and threat narratives[158] rejecting the political establishment.[159] The absolutist rhetoric emphasizes non-negotiable boundaries and moral outrage at their supposed violation.[160][note 10]

Money-Kyrle pattern

A particular pattern is common for authoritarian movements. First, elicit a sense of depression, humiliation and victimhood. Second, separate the world into two opposing groups: a demonized set of others versus those who have the power and will to overcome them.[163] This involves identifying the enemy supposedly causing the current state of affairs and then promoting conspiracy theories and fearmongering to inflame fear and anger. After cycling these first two patterns through the populace, the final message aims to produce a cathartic release of pent-up ochlocracy and mob energy, with a promise that salvation is at hand because the leader will deliver the nation back to its former glory.[164]This three-part pattern was identified in 1932 by Roger Money-Kyrle who wrote *Psychology of Propaganda*.[165] Reporting on Trumpist rallies has documented expressions of the Money-Kyrle pattern and associated stagecraft.[166][167]

Trump rallies

Critical theory scholar Douglas Kellner compares the elaborate staging of Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will* with that used in Trump rallies using the example of the preparation of photo op sequences and aggressive hyping of huge attendance expected for Trump's 2015 primary event in Mobile, Alabama, when the media coverage repeatedly cuts between the Trump jet circling the stadium, the rising excitement of rapturous admirers below, the motorcade and the final triumphal entrance of the individual Kellner claims is being presented as the "political savior to help them out with their problems and address their grievances".[168]

Trump at a Make America Great Again rally in Arizona, 2018

Connolly thinks the performance draws energy from the crowd's anger as it channels it, drawing it into a collage of anxieties, frustrations and resentments about malaise themes, such as deindustrialization, offshoring, racial tensions, political correctness, a more humble position for the United States in global security, economics and so on. Connolly observes that animated gestures, pantomiming, facial expressions, strutting and finger pointing are incorporated as part of the theater, transforming the anxiety into anger directed at particular targets, concluding that "each element in a Trump performance flows and folds into the others until an aggressive resonance machine is formed that is more intense than its parts."[169] Some compare the symbiotic dynamics of crowd pleasing to that of the professional wrestling style of events which Trump was involved with since the 1980s.[170][171]

Some academics point out that the narrative common in the popular press describing the psychology of such crowds is a repetition of a 19th-century theory by Gustave Le Bon when organized crowds were seen by political elites as potential threats to the social order. In his book *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind* (1895), Le Bon described a sort of collective contagion uniting a crowd into a near religious frenzy, reducing members to barbaric, if not subhuman levels of consciousness with mindless goals.[172] Since such a description depersonalizes supporters, this type of Le Bon analysis is criticized because the would-be defenders of liberal democracy simultaneously are dodging responsibility for investigating grievances

while also unwittingly accepting the same us vs. them framing of illiberalism.[173][174] Connolly acknowledges the risks but considers it more risky to ignore that Trumpian persuasion is successful due to deliberate use of techniques evoking more mild forms of affective contagion.[175]

Rhetoric

Trump relies on theatrical devices to market his messages, including animated gestures, pantomiming and facial expressions.[169] Photo is from the 2019 Conservative Political Action Conference.

A constant barrage of rhetoric rivets media attention while obscuring actions such as neoliberal deregulation. One study concluded that significant environmental deregulation occurred during the first year of the Trump administration but, due to its concurrent use of racist rhetoric, escaped much media attention. According to the authors, the rhetoric served political objectives of dehumanizing its targets, eroding democratic norms, and consolidating power by emotionally connecting with and inflaming resentments among the base of followers and distracted media attention from deregulatory policymaking by igniting media coverage of the distractions.[176]

According to civil rights lawyer Burt Neuborne and political theorist William E. Connolly, Trumpist rhetoric employs tropes similar to those used by fascists in Germany[179] to persuade citizens (at first a minority) to give up democracy, by using a barrage of falsehoods, half-truths, personal invective, threats, xenophobia, national-security scares, religious bigotry, white racism, exploitation of economic insecurity, and a never-ending search for scapegoats.[180] Neuborne found twenty parallel practices,[181] such as creating what amounts to an "alternate reality" in adherents' minds, through direct communications, by nurturing a fawning mass media and by deriding scientists to erode the notion of objective truth;[182] organizing carefully orchestrated mass rallies;[183] attacking judges when legal cases are lost;[184] using lies, half-truths, insults, vituperation and innuendo to marginalize, demonize and destroy opponents;[183] making jingoistic appeals to ultranationalist fervor;[183] and promising to stop the flow of "undesirable" ethnic groups who are made scapegoats for the nation's ills.[185]

Trump was the most prominent promoter of the birther conspiracy theory used to delegitimize his political rival employing a political tactic known as the big lie.[177][178]

Connolly presents a similar list in his book *Aspirational Fascism* (2017), adding comparisons of the integration of theatrics and crowd participation with rhetoric, involving grandiose bodily gestures, grimaces, hysterical charges, dramatic repetitions of alternate reality falsehoods, and totalistic assertions incorporated into signature phrases that audiences are encouraged to join in chanting.[186] Despite the similarities, Connolly stresses that Trump is no Nazi but is "an aspirational fascist who pursues crowd adulation, hyperaggressive nationalism, white triumphalism, and militarism, pursues a law-and-order regime giving unaccountable power to the police, and is a practitioner of a rhetorical style that regularly creates fake news and smears opponents to mobilize support for the Big Lies he advances."[179]

In his 2024 book *Trump and Hitler: A Comparative Study in Lying*, cultural theorist Henk de Berg points to a number of further parallels between Trump's and Hitler's rhetoric; namely, the use of jokes and personal insults; the deliberate creation of controversy; interpretative openness, allowing different groups to recognize themselves in the argument; and oratorical meandering in cases where a coherent narrative

would draw attention to the argument's inconsistencies.[187] De Berg also points out that extremist language is by Trump's followers often perceived as authentic, because in real life we also tend to overstate things (e.g., "My new boss is worse than Stalin").[188]

Branding

Trump used personal branding to market himself as an extraordinary leader by using his celebrity status and name recognition. As one of the communications director for the MAGA super PAC put it in 2016, "Like Hercules, Donald Trump is a work of fiction."[189] Journalism professor Mark Danner explains that "week after week for a dozen years millions of Americans saw Donald J. Trump portraying the business magus [in *The Apprentice*], the grand vizier of capitalism, the wise man of the boardroom, a living confection whose every step and word bespoke gravitas and experience and power and authority and ... money. Endless amounts of money."[190]

Political science scholar Andrea Schneiker regards the branding strategy of the Trump public persona as that of a superhero who "uses his superpowers to save others, that is, his country. ... a superhero is needed to solve the problems of ordinary Americans ... Hence, the superhero per definition is an anti-politician. Due to his celebrity status and his identity as entertainer, Donald Trump can thereby be considered to be allowed to take extraordinary measures and even to break rules."[191][192]

Appeal to emotions

Historian Peter E. Gordon observes that "Trump, far from being a violation of the norm, actually signifies an emergent norm of the social order" where the categories of the psychological and political have dissolved.[193][note 11] In accounting for Trump's election and ability to sustain high approval ratings among voters, Erika Tucker writes in the book *Trump and Political Philosophy* that though all presidential campaigns have strong emotions associated with them, Trump was able to recognize, and then to gain the trust and loyalty of those who felt strong emotions about perceived changes in the United States. She notes, "Political psychologist Drew Westen has argued that Democrats are less successful at gauging and responding to affective politics—issues that arouse strong emotional states."[195]

Examining the populist appeal of Trump, Hidalgo-Tenorio and Benítez-Castro draw on the theories of Ernesto Laclau, writing, "The emotional appeal of populist discourse is key to its polarising effects, this being so much so that populism 'would be unintelligible without the affective component.' (Laclau 2005, 11)"[196][197]

Trump uses rhetoric that political scientists have deemed to be both dehumanizing and connected to physical violence by Trump's followers.[198]

Emotion, trust and media

Communications scholar Michael Carpini states that "Trumpism is a culmination of trends that have been occurring for several decades. What we are witnessing is nothing short of a fundamental shift in the relationships between journalism, politics, and democracy." Among the shifts, Carpini identifies "the collapsing of the prior [media] regime's presumed and enforced distinctions between news and entertainment."[199] Examining Trump's use of media for the book *Language in the Trump Era*,

communication professor Marco Jacquemet writes that this approach "assumes (correctly, it appears) that his audiences care more about shock and entertainment value in their media consumption than almost anything else."[200]

Plasser & Ulram (2003) describe a media logic which emphasizes "personalization ... a political star system ... [and] sports based dramatization."[201] Olivier Jutel notes that "Donald Trump's celebrity status and reality-TV rhetoric of 'winning' and 'losing' corresponds perfectly to these values", asserting that "Fox News and conservative personalities from Rush Limbaugh, Glenn Beck and Alex Jones do not simply represent a new political and media voice but embody the convergence of politics and media in which affect and enjoyment are the central values of media production."[202]

Studying paranoia in media, anthropologist Jessica Johnson writes, "Rather than finding accurate news meaningful, Facebook users find the affective pleasure of connectivity addictive, whether or not the information they share is factual, and that is how communicative capitalism captivates subjects as it holds them captive."[203] Looking back at the world prior to social media, communications researcher Brian L. Ott writes: "I'm nostalgic for the world of television that [Neil] Postman (1985) argued, produced the 'least well-informed people in the Western world' by packaging news as entertainment. (pp. 106–107)[204] Twitter is producing the most self-involved people in history by treating everything one does or thinks as newsworthy. Television may have assaulted journalism, but Twitter killed it."[205] Commenting on Trump's support among Fox News viewers, Hofstra University Communication Dean Mark Lukasiewicz has a similar perspective, writing, "Tristan Harris famously said that social networks are about 'affirmation, not information'—and the same can be said about cable news, especially in prime time."[206]

Arlie Russell Hochschild holds that Trump supporters trust their preferred sources of information due to the affective bond they have with them. As media scholar Daniel Kreiss summarizes Hochschild, "Trump, along with Fox News, gave these strangers in their own land the hope that they would be restored to their rightful place at the center of the nation, and provided a very real emotional release from the fetters of political correctness that dictated they respect people of color, lesbians and gays, and those of other faiths ... that the network's personalities share the same 'deep story' of political and social life, and therefore they learn from them 'what to feel afraid, angry, and anxious about.'"[207]

The American way of upward mobility for the deserving is, according to Kimmel and Hochschild, a promise that many Americans feel has been denied them due to forces described within a shared "deep story" commonly held among Trump supporters.

From Kreiss's 2018 account of conservative personalities and media, information became less important than providing a sense of familial bonding, where "family provides a sense of identity, place, and belonging; emotional, social, and cultural support and security; and gives rise to political and social affiliations and beliefs."[208] Hochschild gives the example of a woman who states, "Bill O'Reilly is like a steady, reliable dad. Sean Hannity is like a difficult uncle who rises to anger too quickly. Megyn Kelly[note 12] is like a smart sister. Then there's Greta Van Susteren. And Juan Williams, who came over from NPR, which was too left for him, the adoptee. They're all different, just like in a family."[209]

Media scholar Olivier Jutel notes that, "Affect is central to the brand strategy of Fox which imagined its journalism not in terms of servicing the rational citizen in the public sphere but in 'craft[ing] intensive relationships with their viewers' (Jones, 2012: 180) in order to sustain audience share across platforms."[note 13] In this segmented market, Trump "offers himself as an ego-ideal to an individuated

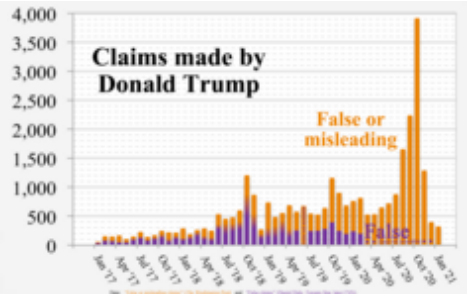
public of enjoyment that coalesce around his media brand as part of their own performance of identity." Jutel states that news media companies benefit from offering spectacle and drama. "Trump is a definitive product of mediatized politics providing the spectacle that drives ratings and affective media consumption, either as part of his populist movement or as the liberal resistance."[210]

Researchers give differing emphasis to which emotions are important to followers. Michael Richardson argues in the *Journal of Media and Cultural Studies* that "affirmation, amplification and circulation of disgust is one of the primary affective drivers of Trump's political success." Richardson agrees with Ott about the "entanglement of Trumpian affect and social media crowds" who seek "affective affirmation, confirmation and amplification. Social media postings of crowd experiences accumulate as 'archives of feelings' that are both dynamic in nature and affirmative of social values (Pybus 2015, 239)."[211][212]

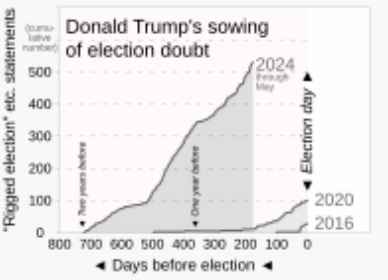
Using Trump as an example, social trust expert Karen Jones follows philosopher Annette Baier in explaining that the masters of the art of creating trust and distrust are populist politicians and criminals, who "show a masterful appreciation of the ways in which certain emotional states drive out trust and replace it with distrust."[213] Jones sees Trump as an exemplar of this class who recognize that fear and contempt are tools that can reorient networks of trust and distrust in social networks in order to alter how a potential supporter "interprets the words, deeds, and motives of the other."[note 14] She holds that "A core strategy of Donald Trump, both as candidate and president, has been to manufacture fear and contempt towards some undocumented migrants (among other groups)", a strategy which "has gone global ... in Australia, Austria, Hungary, Poland, Italy and the United Kingdom."[213]

Falsehoods

There are many falsehoods which Trump presents as facts.[224] Drawing on Harry G. Frankfurt's book *On Bullshit*, political science professor Matthew McManus argues that Trump as a bullshitter whose sole interest is to persuade, and not a liar (e.g. Richard Nixon) who takes the power of truth seriously and so deceitfully attempts to conceal it. Trump by contrast is indifferent to the truth or unaware of it.[225] Unlike conventional lies of politicians exaggerating their accomplishments, Trump's lies are egregious, making lies about easily verifiable facts. At one rally Trump stated his father "came from Germany", even though Fred Trump was born in New York City.[226]



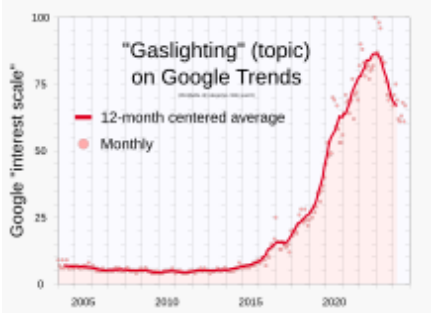
Fact-checkers from *The Washington Post*,[215] the *Toronto Star*,[216] and CNN[217][218] compiled data on "false or misleading claims", and "false claims", respectively. The *Post* reported 30,573 false or misleading claims in four years,[215] an average of more than 20.9 per day.



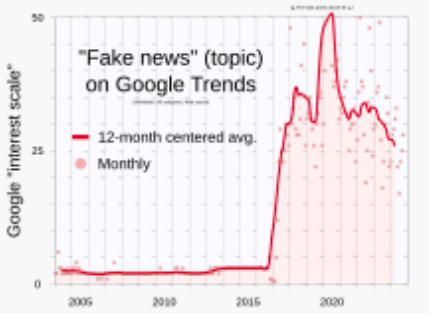
To sow election doubt, Trump escalated use of "rigged election" and "election interference" statements in advance of the 2024 election compared to the previous two elections—the statements described as part of a "heads I win; tails you cheated" rhetorical strategy.[219]

Leaders at the 2018 United Nations General Assembly burst into laughter at his boast that he had accomplished more in his first two years than any other United States president. Visibly startled, Trump responded to the audience: "I didn't expect that reaction."[226] Trump lies about the trivial, such as claiming

that there was no rain on the day of his inauguration when in fact it did rain, as well as making grandiose "Big Lies", such as claiming that Obama founded ISIS, or promoting the birther movement, a conspiracy theory which claims that Obama was born in Kenya, not Hawaii.[227] Connolly points to the similarities of such reality-bending gaslighting with fascist and post Soviet techniques of propaganda including Kompromat (scandalous material), stating that "Trumpian persuasion draws significantly upon the repetition of Big Lies."[228]



Google Trends topic searches for "Gaslighting" began a substantial increase in 2016, at the time of the campaign for the U.S. presidential election.[220]



Google Trends topic searches for "Fake news" began a substantial increase in late 2016, about the time of the U.S. presidential election.[221]

Trump's opposition to wind power involves repeated claims that "windmills" "kill the birds",[222] but cats in the U.S. actually kill on the order of 10,000 times as many birds as wind turbines.[223]

Robert Jay Lifton, a scholar of psychohistory and authority on the nature of cults, emphasizes the importance of understanding Trumpism "as an assault on reality". A leader has more power if he is in any part successful at making truth irrelevant to his followers.[229] Trump biographer Timothy L. O'Brien agrees, stating: "It is a core operating principle of Trumpism. If you constantly attack objective reality, you are left as the only trustworthy source of information, which is one of his goals for his relationship with his supporters—that they should believe no one else but him."[230] Lifton believes Trump is a purveyor of a solipsistic reality[231] which is hostile to facts and is made collective by amplifying frustrations and fears held by his community of zealous believers.

Research published in the *American Sociological Review* found that Trump's lying helped boost his "authentic appeal". It argued that in systems viewed as flawed or with low political legitimacy, a "flagrant violator of established norms" is seen "as an authentic champion" by being perceived as "bravely speaking a deep and otherwise suppressed truth" against a political establishment that does not appear to be working on behalf of the people. While a perceived establishment candidate "may be more likable or perceived to be more competent", voters question the candidates opposition to "the injustice that is said to have permeated the established political system".[232] Andrew Gumbel, writing for *The Guardian* after the 2024 presidential election, wrote that many Trump voters in Youngstown, Ohio saw both parties as filled with crooks and liars, but that Trump "comes across as someone who doesn't pretend to be anything other than what he is, and that perceived authenticity counts for more with many Youngstown voters than his character flaws or even his policy positions". Gumbel aruged that voters preferred "gut instincts" to "carefully scripted messaging of a Democrat like Kamala Harris or even a mainstream Republican".[233]

Social psychology

Dominance orientation

Social psychology research into the Trump movement, such as that of Bob Altemeyer, Thomas F. Pettigrew, and Karen Stenner, views the Trump movement as primarily being driven by the psychological predispositions of its followers,[8][234][235] although political and historical factors (reviewed elsewhere in this article) are also involved.[235] An article in *Social Psychological and Personality Science* described a study concluding that Trump followers prefer hierarchical and ethnocentric social orders that favor their in-group.[236]

Trump supporters employed a variety of dominance imagery in flags, clothing and a mock gallows on January 6, 2021, when violent Trumpist rioters attempted to overturn the 2020 election, temporarily succeeding in preventing Congress from certifying Trump's loss.

In the non-academic book, *Authoritarian Nightmare: Trump and His Followers*, Altemeyer and John Dean describe research which reaches the same conclusions. Despite disparate and inconsistent beliefs and ideologies, a coalition of such followers can become cohesive and broad in part because each individual "compartmentalizes" their thoughts[237] and they are free to define their sense of the threatened tribal in-group[238] in their own terms, whether it is predominantly related to their cultural or religious views[239] (e.g. the mystery of evangelical support for Trump), nationalism[240] (e.g. the Make America Great Again slogan), or their race (maintaining a white majority).[241]

Altemeyer, MacWilliams, Feldman, Choma, Hancock, Van Assche and Pettigrew claim that instead of directly attempting to measure such ideological, racial or policy views, supporters of such movements can be reliably predicted by using two social psychology scales (singly or in combination), namely right-wing authoritarian (RWA) measures which were developed in the 1980s by Altemeyer and other authoritarian personality researchers,[note 15] and the social dominance orientation (SDO) scale developed in the 1990s by social dominance theorists.

Mock gallows and Trump supporters attacking Congress on January 6, 2021

In May 2019, Monmouth University Polling Institute conducted a study in collaboration with Altemeyer in order to empirically test the hypothesis using the SDO and RWA measures. The finding was that social dominance orientation and affinity for authoritarian leadership are highly correlated with followers of Trumpism.[242] This study further confirmed of the studies discussed in MacWilliams (2016), Feldman (2020), Choma and Hancock (2017), and Van Assche & Pettigrew (2016).[243]

The research does not imply that the followers always behave in an authoritarian manner but that expression is contingent, which means there is reduced influence if it is not triggered by fear and what the subject perceives as threats.[234][244][245] Similar social psychological techniques for analyzing Trumpism have been effective in identifying adherents of similar movements in Europe, including in Belgium and France (Lubbers & Scheepers, 2002; Swyngedouw & Giles, 2007; Van Hiel & Mervielde, 2002; Van Hiel, 2012), the Netherlands (Cornelis & Van Hiel, 2014) and Italy (Leone, Desimoni & Chirumbolo, 2014).[246] Quoting comments from participants in focus groups made up of people who had voted for Democrat Obama in 2012 but flipped to Trump in 2016, pollster Diane Feldman noted the anti-government, anti-coastal-elite anger: "'They think they're better than us, they're P.C., they're virtue-signallers.' '[Trump] doesn't come across as one of those people who think they're better than us and are screwing us.' 'They lecture us.' 'They don't even go to church.' 'They're in charge, and they're ripping us off.'"[144]

Comparisons to animal social behavior

Former speaker of the House Newt Gingrich explained the central role of dominance in his speech "Principles of Trumpism", comparing the needed leadership style to that of a violent bear. Psychology researcher Dan P. McAdams thinks a better comparison is to the dominance behavior of alpha male chimpanzees such as Yeroen, the subject of an extensive study of chimp social behavior conducted by renowned primatologist Frans de Waal.[247] Christopher Boehm, a professor of biology and anthropology agrees, writing, "his model of political posturing has echoes of what I saw in the wild in six years in Tanzania studying the Gombe chimpanzees," and "seems like a classic alpha display."[248]

Using the example of Yeroen, McAdams describes the similarities: "On Twitter, Trump's incendiary tweets are like Yeroen's charging displays. In chimp colonies, the alpha male occasionally goes berserk and starts screaming, hooting, and gesticulating wildly as he charges toward other males nearby. Pandemonium ensues as rival males cower in fear ... Once the chaos ends, there is a period of peace and order, wherein rival males pay homage to the alpha, visiting him, grooming him, and expressing various forms of submission. In Trump's case, his tweets are designed to intimidate his foes and rally his submissive base ... These verbal outbursts reinforce the president's dominance by reminding everybody of his wrath and his force."[249]

Primatologist Dame Jane Goodall explains that like the dominance performances of Trump, "In order to impress rivals, males seeking to rise in the dominance hierarchy perform spectacular displays: Stamping, slapping the ground, dragging branches, throwing rocks. The more vigorous and imaginative the display, the faster the individual is likely to rise in the hierarchy, and the longer he is likely to maintain that position." The comparison has been echoed by political observers sympathetic to Trump. Nigel Farage, an enthusiastic backer of Trump, stated that in the 2016 United States presidential debates where Trump loomed up on Clinton, he "looked like a big silverback gorilla", and added that "he is that big alpha male. The leader of the pack!"[250]

McAdams points out the audience gets to vicariously share in the sense of dominance due to the parasocial bonding that his performance produces for his fans, as shown by Shira Gabriel's research studying the phenomenon in Trump's role in *The Apprentice*.[251] McAdams writes that the "television audience vicariously experienced the world according to Donald Trump", a world where Trump says "Man is the most vicious of all animals, and life is a series of battles ending in victory or defeat."[252]

Collective narcissism

Cultural anthropologist Paul Stoller thinks Trump employed celebrity culture-glitz, illusion and fantasy to construct a shared alternate reality where lies become truth and reality's resistance to one's own dreams is overcome by the right attitude and bold self-confidence.[253] Trump's father indoctrinated his children from an early age into the positive thinking approach to reality advocated by the family's pastor Norman Vincent Peale.[254] Trump said that Peale considered him the greatest student of his philosophy that regards facts as not important, because positive attitudes will instead cause what you "image" to materialize.[255] Trump biographer Gwenda Blair thinks Trump "weaponized" Peale's self-help philosophy.[256]

Collective narcissism measures have been shown to be a powerful predictor of membership in authoritarian movements including Trump's.[257]

External videos

- Presentation by John Fea on *Believe Me: The Evangelical Road to Donald Trump*, July 7, 2018 (https://www.c-span.org/video/?448033-1/believe-me), C-SPAN
- *Washington Journal* interview with Fea on *Believe Me*, July 8, 2018 (https://www.c-span.org/video/?447988-3/john-fea-evangelicals-president-trump), C-SPAN

In his book *Believe Me* which details Trump's exploitation of white evangelical politics of fear, Messiah College history professor John Fea points out the narcissistic nature of the fanciful appeals to nostalgia, noting that "In the end, the practice of nostalgia is inherently selfish because it focuses entirely on our own experience of the past and not on the experience of others. For example, people nostalgic for the world of *Leave It to Beaver* may fail to recognize that other people, perhaps even some of the people living in the Cleaver's suburban "paradise" of the 1950s, were not experiencing the world in a way that they would describe as 'great.' Nostalgia can give us tunnel vision. Its selective use of the past fails to recognize the complexity and breadth of the human experience ... ."[258]

According to Fea, the hopelessness of achieving an idealized past "causes us to imagine a future filled with horror" leading to conspiratorial narratives that easily mobilize white evangelicals.[260] As a result, they are easily captivated by a strongman such as Trump who repeats and amplifies their fears while posing as the deliverer from them. In his review of Fea's analysis of the impact of conspiracy theories on white evangelical Trump supporters, scholar of religious politics David Gutterman writes: "The greater the threat, the more powerful the deliverance." Gutterman's view is that "Donald J. Trump did not invent this formula; evangelicals have, in their lack of spiritual courage, demanded and gloried in this message for generations. Despite the literal biblical reassurance to 'fear not,' white evangelicals are primed for fear, their identity is stoked by fear, and the sources of fear are around every unfamiliar turn.[261]

According to historian John Fea, many Trump followers seek refuge from change by urging return to a utopian *Leave it to Beaver* version of America.[259]

Social theory scholar John Cash notes that disaster narratives of impending horrors have a broad audience, pointing to a 2010 Pew study which found that 41 percent of those in the US think that the world will probably be destroyed by the middle of the century. Cash points out that certainties may be found in other narratives which also have the effect of uniting like minded individuals into shared "us versus them" narratives.[262]

Cash thinks that psychoanalytic theorist Joel Whitebook is correct that "Trumpism as a social experience can be understood as a psychotic like phenomenon, that "[Trumpism is] an intentional [...] attack on our relation to reality." Whitebook thinks Trump's playbook is like that of Putin's strategist Vladislav Surkov who employs "ceaseless shapeshifting, appealing to nationalist skinheads one moment and human rights groups the next."[262]

Cash compares *Alice in Wonderland* to Trump's ability to seemingly embrace disparate fantasies in a series of contradictory tweets and pronouncements, for example appearing to encourage the "neo-Nazi protestors" after Charlottesville or for audiences with felt grievances about America's first black president, the claim that Obama wiretapped him. Cash writes: "Unlike the resilient Alice, who ... insists on truth and accuracy when confronted by a world of reversals, contradictions, nonsense and irrationality, Trump reverses this process. ... Trump has dragged the uninhibited and distorted world of the other side of the looking-glass into our shared world."[263]

Lifton sees important differences between Trumpism and typical cults, such as not advancing a totalist ideology and lack of isolation from the outside world. Lifton identifies similarities with cults that disparage the "fake world" created by the cult's titanic enemies.

Cultlike persuasion techniques are used, such as echoing of catch phrases. Examples include the use of call and response ("Clinton" triggers "lock her up"; "immigrants" triggers "build that wall"; "who will pay for it?" triggers "Mexico"), deepening the sense of unity between the leader and the community.[264] Participants and observers at rallies have remarked on a liberating feeling which Lifton calls a "high state" that "can even be called experiences of transcendence".[265]

Conspiracy theories

Conservative culture commentator David Brooks observes that under Trump, this post-truth mindset, heavily reliant on conspiracy themes, came to dominate Republican identity, providing its believers a sense of superiority since such insiders possess important information most people do not have.[268] This results in an empowering sense of agency[269] with the liberation, entitlement and group duty to reject "experts" and the influence of hidden cabals seeking to dominate them.[268]

Conspiracy theories such as QAnon are widely accepted among Trump supporters according to polling data from 2020.[266][267] Pictured are Vice President Mike Pence and members of the Broward County, Florida SWAT team assigned to a high-profile security detail, one of whom is wearing a QAnon patch.

Prior to 2015, Trump already had established a bond with followers due to television and media appearances.[251] For those sharing his political views, Trump's use of Twitter to share his views caused those bonds to intensify, causing his supporters to feel a deepened empathetic bond as with a friend—sharing his anger and outrage, taking pride in his successes, sharing in his denial of failures and his oftentimes conspiratorial views.[270]

Brooks thinks sharing of conspiracy theories has become the most powerful community bonding mechanism of the 21st century.[268]

Hofstadter's *The Paranoid Style in American Politics* describes the political efficacy of conspiracy theories. Some attribute Trump's political success to making such narratives a rhetorical staple.[275] The conspiracy theory QAnon asserts that top Democrats run a child sex-trafficking ring and Trump is trying to dismantle

it. An October 2020 Yahoo-YouGov poll showed that elements of the QAnon claims are said to be true by half of Trump supporters polled.[266][267]

Dominance imagery using the Stop the Steal conspiracy theme erected on the day of the Capitol assault. 75 percent of Republicans believe the conspiracy theory[271] with nearly half approving of the Capitol assault.[272][note 16]

Some social psychologists see the predisposition of Trumpists towards interpreting social interactions in terms of dominance frameworks as extending to their relationship towards facts. A study by Felix Sussenbach and Adam B. Moore found that the dominance motive strongly correlated with hostility towards disconfirming facts and affinity for conspiracies among 2016 Trump voters but not among Clinton voters.[276] Many critics note Trump's skill in exploiting narrative, emotion, and a whole host of rhetorical ploys to draw supporters into the group's common adventure[277] as characters in a story much bigger than themselves.[278]

It is a story that involves not just a community-building call to arms to defeat titanic threats,[158] or of the leader's heroic deeds restoring American greatness, but of a restoration of each supporter's individual sense of liberty and control.[279] Trump channels and amplifies these aspirations, explaining in one of his books that his bending of the truth is effective because it plays to people's greatest fantasies.[280] By contrast, Clinton was dismissive of such emotion-filled storytelling and ignored the emotional dynamics of the Trumpist narrative.[281]

Cult of personality

Trump's support has been compared to a cult of personality.[d] Trump's message and self-representation involved the creation of an identity as a non-politician, businessman, and great leader, distancing himself from traditional politicians and the Republican Party. His strategy involved the creation of an ethos of "saving America" through populist intentions and fighting imagined enemies with "I versus them" rhetoric that constituted the formation of a cult of personality.[283] Trump's embrace by a contingent of hard-core supporters allowed him to maintain a grip on his political party even after several actions and controversies would have discredited other politicians.[284]

Trump was also widely described by news media and commentators as the recipient of a personality cult.[288][289][290] His support was found to satisfy all parameters needed to determine a personality cult based on Max Weber's charismatic authority.[35] Research found examples of asymmetric bias by his supporters in favor of Trump that did not exist among left-leaning individuals among alleged cases of "Trump derangement syndrome".[36] Other research has argued that Trump's personality cult revolves around an "all-powerful, charismatic figure, contributing to a social milieu at risk for the erosion of democratic principles and the rise of fascism" based on the analysis of psycoanalists and sociopolitical historians.[285] Research has found positive correlations that his most loyal followers have a personality-based attraction to the president and that those with a positive correlation to conscienciousness among the Big Five personality traits among the self-dicipline facet were the most likely to be attracted to "personalistic, loyalty-demanding leaders" like Trump.[284] Several aspects of Trump's cult-like loyalty have been found to have religious-parallels among certain supporters, and that certain evangelicals have referred to him in religious terms by casting him as a divinely ordained savior and "chosen one".[284][124]

Relationship with media

Culture industry and pillarization

Peter E. Gordon, Alex Ross, sociologist David L. Andrews and Harvard political theorist David Lebow look on Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer's concept of the "culture industry" as useful for comprehending Trumpism.[note 17] As Ross explains the concept, the culture industry replicates "fascist methods of mass hypnosis ... blurring the line between reality and fiction", explaining, "Trump is as much a pop-culture phenomenon as he is a political one."[292] Gordon observes that these purveyors of popular culture are not just leveraging outrage,[293] but are turning politics into a more commercially lucrative product, a "polarized, standardized reflection of opinion into forms of humor and theatricalized outrage within narrow niche markets ... within which one swoons to one's preferred slogan and already knows what one knows. Name just about any political position and what sociologists call 'pillarization'—or what the Frankfurt School called 'ticket' thinking—will predict, almost without fail, a full suite of opinions."[294][note 18]

Trumpism is from Lebow's perspective, more of a result of this process than a cause.[296] In the intervening years since Adorno's work, Lebow believes the culture industry has evolved into a politicizing culture market "based increasingly on the internet, constituting a self-referential hyperreality shorn from any reality of referants ... sensationalism and insulation intensify intolerance of dissonance and magnify hostility against alternative hyperrealities. In a self-reinforcing logic of escalation, intolerance and hostility further encourage sensationalism and the retreat into insularity."[296][note 19] From Gordon's view, "Trumpism itself, one could argue, is just another name for the culture industry, where the performance of undoing repression serves as a means for carrying on precisely as before."[298]

From this viewpoint, the susceptibility to psychological manipulation of individuals with social dominance inclinations is not at the center of Trumpism, but is instead the "culture industry" which exploits these and other susceptibilities by using mechanisms that condition people to think in standardized ways.[193] The burgeoning culture industry respects no political boundaries as it develops these markets with Gordon emphasizing "This is true on the left as well as the right, and it is especially noteworthy once we countenance what passes for political discourse today. Instead of a public sphere, we have what Jürgen Habermas long ago called the refeudalization of society."[299]

What Kreiss calls an "identity-based account of media" is important for understanding Trump's success because "citizens understand politics and accept information through the lens of partisan identity. ... The failure to come to grips with a socially embedded public and an identity group–based democracy has placed significant limits on our ability to imagine a way forward for journalism and media in the Trump era. As Fox News and Breitbart have discovered, there is power in the claim of representing and working for particular publics, quite apart from any abstract claims to present the truth."[300]

Profitability of spectacle and outrage

Examining Trumpism as an entertainment product, some media research focuses on outrage discourse, relating the entertainment value of Trump's rhetoric to the commercial interests of media companies.[301] Outrage narratives on political blogs, talk radio and cable news shows were, in the decades prior, a new genre which grew due to its profitability.[302][303]

Media critic David Denby writes, "Like a good standup comic, Trump invites the audience to join him in the adventure of delivering his act—in this case, the barbarously entertaining adventure of running a Presidential campaign that insults everybody." Denby claims that Trump is good at delivering entertainment that consumers demand. He observes that "The *movement's* standard of allowable behavior has been formed by popular culture—by standup comedy and, recently, by reality TV and by the snarking, trolling habits of the Internet. ... it's exactly vulgar sensationalism and buffoonery that his audience is buying. Donald Trump has been produced by America."[277]

Trump made false assertions, mean spirited attacks and dog whistle appeals to racial and religious intolerance. CBS's CEO Les Moonves remarked that "It may not be good for America, but it's damn good for CBS,"[304] demonstrating how Trump's messaging is compatible with the financial goals of media companies.[305] Peter Wehner, senior fellow at the Ethics and Public Policy Center considers Trump a political "shock jock" who "thrives on creating disorder, in violating rules, in provoking outrage."[306]

The political profitability of incivility was demonstrated by the amount of airtime devoted to Trump's 2016 primary campaign—estimated at two billion[307] to almost five billion dollars.[308] The advantage of incivility was as true in social media, where "a BuzzFeed analysis found that the top 20 fake election news stories emanating from hoax sites and hyperpartisan blogs generated more engagement on Facebook (as measured by shares, reactions, and comments) than the top 20 election stories produced by 19 major news outlets combined, including the New York Times, Washington Post, Huffington Post, and NBC News."[309]

Social media

Donald J. Trump
@realDonaldTrump

My use of social media is not Presidential – it's MODERN DAY PRESIDENTIAL. Make America Great Again!

July 1, 2017[310]

Surveying research of how Trumpist communication is well suited to social media, Brian Ott writes that, "commentators who have studied Trump's public discourse have observed speech patterns that correspond closely to what I identified as Twitter's three defining features [Simplicity, impulsivity, and incivility]."[311] Media critic Neal Gabler has a similar viewpoint writing that "What FDR was to radio and JFK to television, Trump is to Twitter."[312] Outrage discourse expert Patrick O'Callaghan argues that social media is most effective when it utilizes the particular type of communication which Trump relies on. O'Callaghan notes that sociologist Sarah Sobieraj and political scientist Jeffrey M. Berry almost perfectly described in 2011 the social media communication style used by Trump long before his presidential campaign.[313]

They explained that such discourse "[involves] efforts to provoke visceral responses (e.g., anger, righteousness, fear, moral indignation) from the audience through the use of overgeneralizations, sensationalism, misleading or patently inaccurate information, ad hominem attacks, and partial truths about opponents, who may be individuals, organizations, or entire communities of interest (e.g., progressives or conservatives) or circumstance (e.g., immigrants). Outrage sidesteps the messy nuances of complex political issues in favor of melodrama, misrepresentative exaggeration, mockery, and improbable forecasts of impending doom. Outrage talk is not so much discussion as it is verbal competition, political theater with a scorecard."[314]

Due to Facebook's and Twitter's narrowcasting environment in which outrage discourse thrives,[note 20] Trump's employment of such messaging at almost every opportunity was from O'Callaghan's account extremely effective because tweets and posts were repeated in viral fashion among like minded supporters,

thereby rapidly building a substantial information echo chamber,[316] a phenomenon Cass Sunstein identifies as group polarization,[317] and other researchers refer to as a kind of self re-enforcing homophily.[318][note 21] Within these information cocoons, it matters little to social media companies whether much of the information spread in such pillarized information silos is false, because as digital culture critic Olivia Solon points out, "the truth of a piece of content is less important than whether it is shared, liked, and monetized."[321]

Trump's hourly tweet activity from his first tweet in May 2009 until his suspension from the website in 2021. His tweet activity pattern changed markedly in 2013.

Citing Pew Research's survey that found 62% of US adults get their news from social media,[322] Ott expresses alarm, "since the 'news' content on social media regularly features fake and misleading stories from sources devoid of editorial standards."[323] Media critic Alex Ross is similarly alarmed, observing, "Silicon Valley monopolies have taken a hands-off, ideologically vacant attitude toward the upswelling of ugliness on the Internet," and that "the failure of Facebook to halt the proliferation of fake news during the [Trump vs. Clinton] campaign season should have surprised no one. ... Traffic trumps ethics."[292]

O'Callaghan's analysis of Trump's use of social media is that "outrage hits an emotional nerve and is therefore grist to the populist's or the social antagonist's mill. Secondly, the greater and the more widespread the outrage discourse, the more it has a detrimental effect on social capital. This is because it leads to mistrust and misunderstanding amongst individuals and groups, to entrenched positions, to a feeling of 'us versus them'. So understood, outrage discourse not only produces extreme and polarising views but also ensures that a cycle of such views continues. (Consider also in this context Wade Robison (2020) on the 'contagion of passion'[324] and Cass Sunstein (2001, pp. 98–136)[note 22] on 'cybercascades'.)"[316] Ott agrees, stating that contagion is the best word to describe the viral nature of outrage discourse on social media, and writing that "Trump's simple, impulsive, and uncivil Tweets do more than merely reflect sexism, racism, homophobia, and xenophobia; they spread those ideologies like a social cancer."[61]

Robison warns that emotional contagion should not be confused with the contagion of passions that James Madison and David Hume were concerned with.[note 23] Robison states they underestimated the contagion of passions mechanism at work in movements, whose modern expressions include the surprising phenomena of rapidly mobilized social media supporters behind both the Arab Spring and the Trump presidential campaign writing, "It is not that we experience something and then, assessing it, become passionate about it, or not", and implying that "we have the possibility of a check on our passions." Robison's view is that the contagion affects the way reality itself is experienced by supporters because it leverages how subjective certainty is triggered, so that those experiencing the contagiously shared alternate reality are unaware they have taken on a belief they should assess.[326]

Similar movements, politicians and personalities

Historical background in the United States

An 1832 political cartoon depicting two-term President Andrew Jackson as an autocratic king, with the constitution trampled beneath his feet

The roots of Trumpism in the United States can be traced to the Jacksonian era according to scholars Walter Russell Mead,[327] Peter Katzenstein,[148] and Edwin Kent Morris.[328] Eric Rauchway says: "Trumpism—nativism and white supremacy—has deep roots in American history. But Trump himself put it to new and malignant purpose."[329]

Andrew Jackson's followers felt he was one of them, enthusiastically supporting his defiance of politically correct norms of the nineteenth century and even constitutional law when they stood in the way of public policy popular among his followers. Jackson ignored the U.S. Supreme Court ruling in *Worcester v. Georgia* and initiated the forced Cherokee removal from their treaty protected lands to benefit white locals at the cost of between 2,000 and 6,000 dead Cherokee men, women, and children. Notwithstanding such cases of Jacksonian inhumanity, Mead's view is that Jacksonianism provides the historical precedent explaining the movement of followers of Trump, marrying grass-roots disdain for elites, deep suspicion of overseas entanglements, and obsession with American power and sovereignty, acknowledging that it has often been a xenophobic, "whites only" political movement. Mead thinks this "hunger in America for a Jacksonian figure" drives followers towards Trump but cautions that historically "he is not the second coming of Andrew Jackson," stating that Trump's "proposals tended to be pretty vague and often contradictory," exhibiting the common weakness of newly elected populist leaders, commenting early in his presidency that "now he has the difficulty of, you know, 'How do you govern?'"[327]

Morris agrees with Mead, locating Trumpism's roots in the Jacksonian era from 1828 to 1848 under the presidencies of Jackson, Martin Van Buren and James K. Polk. On Morris's view, Trumpism also shares similarities with the post-World War I faction of the progressive movement which catered to a conservative populist recoil from the looser morality of the cosmopolitan cities and America's changing racial complexion.[328] In his book *The Age of Reform* (1955), historian Richard Hofstadter identified this faction's emergence when "a large part of the Progressive-Populist tradition had turned sour, became illiberal and ill-tempered."[330]

Prior to World War II, conservative themes of Trumpism were expressed in the America First Committee movement in the early 20th century, and after World War II were attributed to a Republican Party faction known as the Old Right. By the 1990s, it became referred to as the paleoconservative movement, which according to Morris has now been rebranded as Trumpism.[331] Leo Löwenthal's book *Prophets of Deceit* (1949) summarized common narratives expressed in the post-World War II period of this populist fringe, specifically examining American demagogues of the period when modern mass media was married with the same destructive style of politics that historian Charles Clavey thinks Trumpism represents. According to Clavey, Löwenthal's book best explains the enduring appeal of Trumpism and offers the most striking historical insights into the movement.[332]

Writing in *The New Yorker*, journalist Nicholas Lemann states the post-war Republican Party ideology of fusionism, a fusion of pro-business party establishment with nativist, isolationist elements who gravitated towards the Republican and not the Democratic Party, later joined by Christian evangelicals "alarmed by the rise of secularism", was made possible by the Cold War and the "mutual fear and hatred of the spread of Communism". An article in Politico has referred to Trumpism as "McCarthyism on steroids".[333][144]

A 1927 "America First" political advertisement advocating isolationism and establishing emotional ties of 1927 Chicago mayoral candidate William Hale Thompson with his German and Irish supporters by vilifying the United Kingdom

Championed by William F. Buckley Jr. and brought to fruition by Ronald Reagan in 1980, the fusion lost its glue with the dissolution of the Soviet Union, which was followed by a growth of income inequality in the United States and globalization that "created major discontent among middle and low income whites" within and without the Republican Party. After the 2012 United States presidential election saw the defeat of Mitt Romney by Barack Obama, the party establishment embraced an "autopsy" report, titled the Growth and Opportunity Project, which "called on the Party to reaffirm its identity as pro-market, government-skeptical, and ethnically and culturally inclusive."[144]

Ignoring the findings of the report and the party establishment in his campaign, Trump was "opposed by more officials in his own Party ... than any Presidential nominee in recent American history," but at the same time he won "more votes" in the Republican primaries than any previous presidential candidate. By 2016, "people wanted somebody to throw a brick through a plate-glass window", in the words of political analyst Karl Rove.[144] His success in the party was such that an October 2020 poll found 58% of Republicans and Republican-leaning independents surveyed considered themselves supporters of Trump rather than the Republican Party.[334]

Parallels with fascism and trend towards illiberal democracy

Trumpism has been likened to Machiavellianism and to Benito Mussolini's Italian fascism.[e] Trumpism heavily features authoritarian elements,[a] and siginifcant academic debate exists over the prevalence of fascism and neo-fascism within Trumpism.[b][13][14][15][362][note 3] Several scholars have rejected comparisons with fascism, instead viewing Trump as authoritarian and populist.[363][364]

Some commentators have rejected the populist designation for Trumpism and view it instead as part of a trend towards a new form of fascism or neo-fascism, with some referring to it as explicitly fascist and others as authoritarian and illiberal.[15][11][365][note 3] Others have more mildly identified it as a specific light version of fascism in the United States.[13][14] Some historians, including many of those using a *new fascism* classification,[note 24] write of the hazards of direct comparisons with European fascist regimes of the 1930s, stating that while there are parallels, there are also important dissimilarities.[370][371][note 25]

American historian Robert Paxton changed his opinion on whether the democratic backsliding of Trumpism is fascism or not. In 2017, Paxton believed it bore greater resemblance to plutocracy.[373] Paxton changed his opinion following the 2021 storming of the United States Capitol, stating that it is "necessary" to understand Trumpism as a form of fascism.[374] Drawing on Umberto Eco's 1995 essay *Ur-Fascism*, which outlines 14 characteristics of fascism, historian Bret Devereaux discusses how Trumpism satisfies

each of the 14.[375] Sociology professor Dylan John Riley calls Trumpism "neo-Bonapartist patrimonialism" because it does not capture the same mass movement appeal of classical fascism to be fascism.[376]

Activist group SumOfUs's Projection of "Resist Trumpism Everywhere" on London's Marble Arch as part of protests during Trump's July 2018 visit

Historians and election experts have compared Trump's anti-democratic tendencies and egotistical personality to the sentiments and rhetoric of Benito Mussolini and Italian fascism.[335]

Argentine historian Federico Finchelstein believes intersections exist between Peronism and Trumpism in terms of their disregard for the political system (in the areas of both domestic and foreign policy).[377] American historian Christopher Browning considers the long-term consequences of Trump's policies and the support which he receives for them from the Republican Party to be potentially dangerous for democracy.[378] In the German-speaking debate, the term "fascism" initially appeared sporadically, mostly in connection with the crisis of confidence in politics and the media and described the strategy of mostly right-wing political actors who wish to stir up this crisis in order to profit from it.[379] German literature has a more diverse range of analysis of Trumpism.[note 26]

Others have argued that Trump is a totalitarian capitalist exploiting the "fascist impulses of his *ordinary* supporters that hide in plain sight."[353][354][368] Michelle Goldberg, an opinion columnist for *The New York Times*, compares Trumpism to classical fascist themes.[note 27] The "mobilizing vision" of fascism is of "the national community rising phoenix-like after a period of encroaching decadence which all but destroyed it", which "sounds a lot like MAGA" (Make America Great Again) according to Goldberg. Similarly, like the Trump movement, fascism sees a "need for authority by natural chiefs (always male), culminating in a national chieftain who alone is capable of incarnating the group's historical destiny." They believe in "the superiority of the leader's instincts over abstract and universal reason".[382]

Conservative columnist George Will considers Trumpism similar to fascism, stating that Trumpism is "a mood masquerading as a doctrine". Will argues that national unity is based "on shared domestic dreads"—for fascists the "Jews", for Trump the media ("enemies of the people"), "elites" and "globalists". Solutions come not from tedious "incrementalism and conciliation", but from the leader (who claims "only I can fix it") unfettered by procedure. The political base is kept entertained with mass rallies, but inevitably the strongman develops a contempt for those he leads.[note 28] Will argues both are based on machismo, and in the case of Trumpism, "appeals to those in thrall to country-music manliness: 'We're truck-driving, beer-drinking, big-chested Americans too freedom-loving to let any itsy-bitsy [COVID-19] virus make us wear masks.'"[99][note 29]

In *How to Lose a Country: The 7 Steps from Democracy to Dictatorship*, Turkish author Ece Temelkuran describes Trumpism as similar to rhetoric and actions of the Turkish politician Recep Tayyip Erdoğan during his rise to power. Some of these tactics and views are right-wing populism, demonization of the press, subversion of well-established and proven facts through the big lie (both historical and scientific), democratic backsliding such as dismantling judicial and political mechanisms; portraying systematic issues such as sexism or racism as isolated incidents, and crafting an ideal citizen.[386]

Political scientist Mark Blyth and Jonathan Hopkin believe similarities exist between Trumpism and similar movements towards illiberal democracies worldwide, but that the Trumpist movement is not merely being driven by revulsion, loss, and racism. They argue that both on the right and on the left, the global economy is driving the growth of neo-nationalist coalitions which find followers who want to be free of the constraints which are being placed on them by establishment elites whose members advocate neoliberal economics and globalism.[9]

Others emphasize the lack of interest in finding real solutions to the social malaise which have been identified, and they also believe those individuals and groups who are executing policy are actually following a pattern which has been identified by sociology researchers like Leo Löwenthal and Norbert Guterman as originating in the post-World War II work of the Frankfurt School of social theory. Based on this perspective, books such as Löwenthal and Guterman's *Prophets of Deceit* offer the best insights into how movements like Trumpism dupe their followers by perpetuating their misery and preparing them to move further towards an illiberal form of government.[332]

Rush Limbaugh

Rush Limbaugh speaking in West Palm Beach in 2019

Trump is considered by some analysts to be following a blueprint of leveraging outrage, which was developed on partisan cable TV and talk radio shows[316] such as the Rush Limbaugh radio show—a style that transformed talk radio and American conservative politics decades before Trump.[387] Both shared "media fame" and "over-the-top showmanship", and built an enormous fan base with politics-as-entertainment,[387] attacking political and cultural targets in ways that would have been considered indefensible and beyond the pale in the years before them.[388] Both featured "the insults, the nicknames", and conspiracy theories. Both maintained global warming was a hoax, Barack Obama was not a natural-born U.S. citizen, and the danger of COVID-19 was vastly exaggerated by liberals.[387] Both mocked people with disabilities.[388]

Limbaugh, to whom Trump awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2020, preceded Trump in moving the Republican Party away from "serious and substantive opinion leaders and politicians", towards political provocation, entertainment, and anti-intellectualism, and popularizing and normalizing for "many Republican politicians and voters" what before his rise "they might have thought" but would have "felt uncomfortable saying".[note 30] His millions of fans were intensely loyal and "developed a capacity to excuse ... and deflect" his statements no matter how offensive and outrageous, "saying liberals were merely being hysterical or hateful. And many loved him even more for it."[388]

Future impact

Writing in *The Atlantic*, Yaseem Serhan states Trump's post-impeachment claim that "our historic, patriotic, and beautiful movement to Make America Great Again has only just begun," should be taken seriously as Trumpism is a "personality-driven" populist movement, and other such movements—such as Berlusconism in Italy, Peronism in Argentina and Fujimorism in Peru, "rarely fade once their leaders have left office".[389] Joseph Lowndes, a professor of political science at the University of Oregon, argued that while current far-right Republicans support Trump, the faction rose before and will likely exist after Trump.[390]

Bobby Jindal and Alex Castellanos wrote in *Newsweek* that separating Trumpism from Donald Trump himself was key to the Republican Party's future following his loss in the 2020 United States presidential election.[391]

In 2024, President Kevin Roberts of The Heritage Foundation stated that he sees the role of Heritage as "institutionalizing Trumpism."[392]

Policies

Economic policy

Trumpism "promises new jobs and more domestic investment".[393] Trump's hard line against export surpluses of American trading partners and protectionist trade policies led to a tense situation in 2018 with mutually imposed tariffs by the United States and the European Union versus China.[394] Trump secures the support of his political base emphasizing neo-nationalism and criticism of globalization.[395] One book suggested that Trump "radicalized economics" for white working- to middle-class voters by implying that "undeserving [minority] groups are getting ahead while their group is being left behind."[396]

Foreign policy

In terms of foreign policy in the sense of Trump's "America First", unilateralism and isolationism is preferred to a multilateral policy.[397][398][399][64] National interests are particularly emphasized, especially in the context of economic treaties and alliance obligations.[400][401] Trump has shown a disdain for traditional American allies such as Canada as well as transatlantic partners NATO and the European Union.[402][403] Conversely, Trump has shown sympathy for autocratic rulers, such as Russian president Vladimir Putin, whom Trump often praised even before taking office,[404] and during the 2018 Russia–United States summit.[405] The "America First" foreign policy includes promises by Trump to end American involvement in foreign wars, notably in the Middle East, while also issuing tighter foreign policy through sanctions against Iran, among other countries.[406][407] Trump's proposals during his second presidency to expand the United States by acquiring Canada, Greenland, and the Panama Canal were described by CNN as part of his nationalist "America First" agenda and having "modern echoes of the 19th century doctrine of Manifest Destiny".[408]

Beyond the United States

Canada

Trumpism exists as a political current in Canada.[409][410][411][412][413][414] Law professor Allan Rock, Canada's former attorney general and ambassador to the U.N., said Trump had "given expression to an underlying frustration and anger, that arises from economic inequality, from the implications from globalisation." Rock that the "overtly racist behaviour" associated with Trumpism emboldened racists and white supremacists, resulting in a rise in the number of these organizations and hate crimes in Canada.[415]

According to an October 2020 poll of Canadian voters, the number of "pro-Trump conservatives" was growing in Canada. Maclean's said this was influencing Canadian political campaigns.[416] Erin O'Toole, the leader of the Conservative Party of Canada, featured the slogan—"Take Back Canada"—in a video, stating "[j]oin our fight, let's take back Canada."[417] When asked if his "Canada First" policy was different from Trump's "America First" policy, O'Toole said, "No, it was not."[418] O'Toole criticized what he considered to be Trumpism following one of Liberal Deputy Prime Minister Chrystia Freeland's tweets being flagged as “manipulated media” and compared her to Trump’s flagged tweets,[419][420] prior to Twitter’s acquisition by Elon Musk.[421] Writing for *The Hill* in 2021, Markik Von Rennenkampff stated that there are "striking differences" between the Conservative Party under Erin O'Toole and the Republican Party under Trump, notably O'Toole being pro-choice and his support for Canada’s single-payer health care system.[422] Rennenkampff also described Canadian Conservatives as "far more closely aligned with Democrats than Republicans".[423]

Following the 2022 Conservative Party leadership election, some journalists have compared Conservative Party leader Pierre Poilievre to American Republicans such as Donald Trump and Ted Cruz,[424][425] however many journalists have dismissed these comparisons due to Poilievre's pro-choice, pro-immigration, and pro-same-sex marriage positions.[426][427][428][429][430][431][432][433] In 2024, Zack Beauchamp of *Vox* stated that while Poilievre's rhetoric draws Trump comparisons, in terms of policy "he's actually considerably more moderate than Trump or European radicals".[434]

Europe

Trumpism has also been said to be on the rise in Europe. Political parties such as the Finns Party,[435] France's National Rally[436] and Spain's far-right Vox party[437] have been described as Trumpist in nature. Trump's former advisor Steve Bannon called Hungarian prime minister Viktor Orbán "Trump before Trump".[438] Isabel Díaz Ayuso has also received the Trumpism label.[439][440]

Brazil

In Brazil, Jair Bolsonaro, sometimes referred to as the "Brazilian Donald Trump",[441] who is often described as a right-wing extremist,[442][443] sees Trump as a role model[444] and according to Jason Stanley uses the same fascist tactics.[445] Like Trump, Bolsonaro finds support among evangelicals for his views on culture war issues.[446] Along with allies he publicly questioned Joe Biden's vote tally after the November election.[447]

Argentina

Javier Milei, an Argentinian Austrian economist who was elected in 2023 as President of Argentina has sometimes been likened to Donald Trump.[448][449][450][451] Many other commentators have stressed that the two men are different, however, describing Milei's views as mostly libertarian, such as rejecting protectionism and supporting free trade.[452][453][454][455][456]

Nigeria

According to *The Guardian* and *The Washington Post*, there is a significant affinity towards Trump in Nigeria.[457][458] Donald Trump's comments on the ethno-religious conflicts between Christians and the predominantly Muslim Fulani tribe has contributed to his popularity among Christians in Nigeria, in which he stated: "We have had very serious problems with Christians who are being murdered in Nigeria. We are

going to be working on that problem very, very hard because we cannot allow that to happen".[457] Donald Trump is praised by the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), a secessionist group that supports the independence of Biafra from Nigeria and is designated as a terrorist group by the Nigerian government. IPOB has claimed that he "believes in the inalienable right of an indigenous people to self-determination" and it also praised him for "the direct and serious manner he addressed and demanded immediate end to the serial slaughter of Christians in Nigeria, especially Biafran Christians".[459][460]

After Trump's victory in the 2016 presidential election, IPOB leader Nnamdi Kanu wrote a letter to Trump stating he had a "historic and moral burden ... to liberate the enslaved nations in Africa".[459] As Trump was inaugurated in January 2017, IPOB organized a rally in support of Trump that resulted in violent clashes with Nigerian security forces and resulted in multiple deaths and arrests.[461] On January 30, 2020, IPOB leader Nnamdi Kanu attended a Trump rally in Iowa as a special VIP guest, at the invitation of the Republican Party of Iowa.[462] According to a 2020 poll from Pew Research, 58% of Nigerians had favorable views of Donald Trump, the fourth highest percentage globally.[463]

According to John Campbell of Council on Foreign Relations, Trump's popularity in Nigeria can be explained by a "manifestation of the widespread disillusionment in a country characterized by growing poverty, multiple security threats, an expanding crime wave, and a government seen as unresponsive and corrupt", and his popularity is likely stronger among wealthier urban Nigerians rather than the majority of Nigerians who live in rural areas or urban slums and are unlikely to have strong opinions on Trump.[464]

Iran

Donald Trump and his policy towards Iran has been praised by the Iranian opposition group 'Restart', led by Mohammad Hosseini, which also supports American military action against Iran and offered to fight alongside Americans to overthrow the Iranian government.[465] The group has adopted the slogan "Make Iran Great Again".[465]

Restart has been compared to QAnon by Ariane Tabatabai, in terms of "conspiracist thinking going global".[465] Among conspiracy theories advocated by the group is that Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei has died (or went into coma) in 2017 and a double plays his role in public.[466]

Japan

In Japan, in a speech to Liberal Democratic Party lawmakers in Tokyo on 8 March 2019, Steve Bannon said that Prime Minister Shinzo Abe was "Trump before Trump" and "a great hero to the grassroots, the populist, and the nationalist movement throughout the world."[467] Shinzo Abe was described as a "right-wing nationalist" or "ultra-nationalist",[468][469] but whether he was a "populist" is controversial.[470]

Shinzo Abe and US President Trump in 2017 with "MAGA"-style hats reading "Donald & Shinzo, Make Alliance Even Greater"

Netto-uyoku is the term used to refer to netizens who espouse ultranationalist far-right views on Japanese social media, as well as in English to those who are proficient. *Netto-uyoku* are typically very friendly not only to Japanese nationalists but also to Donald

Trump, and oppose liberal politics. They began spreading Trump's conspiracy theories in an attempt to overturn the 2020 American presidential election.[471]

South Korea

The politics of Yoon Suk Yeol, the president of South Korea, has been called "Trumpist" for his right-wing populist elements.[472]

Philippines

Sheila S. Coronel has argued that the political strategies of Ferdinand Marcos, who was President of the Philippines from 1965 to 1986, and Rodrigo Duterte, who held the same position from 2016 to 2022, share certain features with Trumpism, including disregard for facts, encouragement of fear, and a "loud, bombastic, hypermasculine" aesthetic; and that each has benefited from uncertain political environments.[473]

See also

Modern history portal

Politics portal

United States portal

- Authoritarian conservatism
- Blue MAGA
- Enemy of the people
- Firehose of falsehood
- *God Emperor Trump* (statue)
- List of conspiracy theories promoted by Donald Trump
- Radical right (United States)
- Reality distortion field
- Right-wing authoritarianism
- Freedom Caucus
- Agenda 47
- Political positions of Donald Trump
- Sedition Caucus
- Racial views of Donald Trump

Organizations

- America First Policies
- Conservative Partnership Institute
- John Birch Society
- MAGA Inc.
- Republican Accountability
- The Lincoln Project

- Republicans for the Rule of Law

Notes

1. The *Albert Lea Tribune*'s description of the scene at the September 13, 2020, "United We Stand & Patriots March for America" was that "[p]eople rallied outside the Minnesota Capitol in St. Paul on Saturday in support of President Trump, and against statewide pandemic policies they say are infringing on personal freedoms and damaging the economy. ... Some in the crowd carried long guns and wore body armor." There were physical confrontations resulting in the arrest of two counter-protesters.[1]
2. Believing the Stop the Steal conspiracy theory of electoral fraud, Trumpists acted after being told minutes prior by Trump to "fight like hell" to "take back our country",[2][3] with his personal lawyer Rudy Giuliani calling for "trial by combat",[4] and son Donald Trump Jr. in the prior week warning "we are coming for you" and calling for "total war" over election results.[5][6]
3. Cornel West uses the term *neofascist*. Badiou describes Trump signaling the birth of a "new fascism" or "democratic fascism",[366] while Traverso prefers the term *postfascist* to describe "new faces of fascism" such as Trump or Silvio Berlusconi who advance a model of democracy "that destroys any process of collective deliberation in favour of a relationship that merges people and leader, the nation and its chief."[367] By contrast, Tarizzo describes Trump as part of what Pier Paolo Pasolini called *new fascism*[368] employing a "political grammar" analysis which shares similar perspectives on ties between new fascism and dystopian economics argued in the analyses of Giroux, West, Hedges and Badiou. Chomsky instead uses the term authoritarianism.
4. Papacharissi notes that examples can also be found on the left for the use of open signifiers when *affectively* engaging their bases ("publics").[75]
5. The 88% figure is based on the CBS news report that as of April 16, 2021, 45 out of the 370 arrested were arrested were women.[108]
6. Elaina Plott covers the Republican Party and conservatism as a national political reporter for *The New York Times*. In her in-depth article on how Trump has remade the Republican Party, Plott interviewed thirty or so Republican officials.
7. In contrast, the Democratic Party adopted "a 91-page document with headings such as 'Healing the Soul of America' and 'Restoring and Strengthening Our Democracy'", with disputes over the lack of "language endorsing" universal healthcare or the Green New Deal.
8. A reference to a metaphor found at the close of U.S. President Abraham Lincoln's first inaugural address. Cognitive scientist Steven Pinker explains the impact of these appeals in his book The Better Angels of Our Nature.
9. For a detailed description of this evocation of intense collective emotions in order to engineer group identity, see Cui 2018. Cui writes: "The collective emotions that audiences feel during media events is the modern day equivalent of the collective effervescence in totemic worship (Dayan & Katz, 1992). In primitive societies, intense feelings about the collectivity are generated through the participants physically enacting rituals together. Possessed by these intense feelings, they experience themselves as sharing the collective identity represented by the symbolism in the rituals. In sophisticated industrial societies, people often participate in rituals through the media. Through the live broadcast of ceremonial events, a geographically dispersed population can be temporally synchronized through the symbolic representation of a higher reality. The intense collective emotions these events generate reinforce social identity (Jiménez-Martínez, 2014; Uimonen, 2015; Widholm, 2016)."[157]

10. Trump's scenic construction (introduction of characters and setting stage depicting an issue) use black and white terms to describe malevolent forces, or the coming victory. John Kerry is a "total disaster" and Obamacare would "destroy American health care forever"; Kenneth Burke referred to this "all or none" staging as characteristic of "burlesque" rhetoric.[161] Instead of a world involving a variety of complex situations requiring nuanced solutions acceptable to a multiplicity of interested groups, for the agitator the world is a simple stage populated by two irreconcilable groups and dramatic action involves decisions with simple either-or choices. Because all players and issues are painted using black and white terms, there is no possibility of working out a common solution.[162]
11. Ann Stoler writes, "These are divisive cuts through our social, political, and affective landscapes that are not eruptions, as they are so often described. Rather, these figures [Trump, Le Pen, and Wilders] register deep tectonic shifts not readily visible with the conceptual tools at hand, nor by the metrics we have used to measure durable sensibilities or to capture sonics to which we are so adverse, askew to our shared radars. Prevailing political categories and concepts may now seem inadequate or inoperative."[194]
12. Kelly left Fox in 2017
13. The "(Jones, 2012: 180)" quote appears in Jones, Jeffry P. (2012). "Fox News and the Performance of Ideology". *Cinema Journal*. **51** (4): 178–185. doi:10.1353/cj.2012.0073 (https://doi.org/10.1353%2Fcj.2012.0073). JSTOR 23253592 (https://www.jstor.org/stable/23253592). S2CID 145669733 (https://api.semanticscholar.org/CorpusID:145669733).
14. Jones elaborates on her view that trust is central to epistemology in a chapter entitled "Trusting Interpretations" which appeared in the book "Trust – Analytic and Applied Perspectives".[214]
15. The measure is a refinement of the authoritarian personality theory published in 1950 by researchers Theodor W. Adorno, Else Frenkel-Brunswik, Daniel Levinson and Nevitt Sanford. Despite its name, RWA measures predisposition towards authoritarianism regardless of political orientation.
16. The skull with Trump hair refers to the Punisher comic book vigilante serial killer who murders those he considers evil. More stylized Punisher images appeared on patches worn by some rioters in combat attire, multiple police at Black lives matter protests[273] and frequently as a Sean Hannity's lapel pin.[274]
17. For instance in the introduction to his book *Making Sport Great Again*, Andrews writes, "The prescience of much Frankfurt School theorizing informs this analysis of the relationship between ubersport as a popular culture industry, the politics of neoliberal America, and Trump's cacophonous political-cultural-economic project."[291]
18. The idea is that while markets attempt to turn the population into unthinking mass consumers, political actors (from parties to politicians to interest groups) use the same mechanisms to turn us into unthinking mass citizens—a Frankfurt school concept which Marcuse explored further in his book *One Dimensional Man*. Horkheimer and Adorno's "ticket" metaphor refers to the political party sense of a slate of candidates and policies that followers expect to vote for in its entirety because they have come to believe that the ideas from the opposing political blocs are so irreconcilable their political power is simplified to a binary choice which despite the intense rhetoric reduces them to passive observers of the spectacle.[295]
19. Political scientist Matthew McManus makes a similar observation writing that Trump is the culmination of this trend towards pillarized tribalistic market niches where the hyperpartisan discourses characteristic of Fox News in the US or Hír TV in Hungary have displaced nuanced analysis.[297]
20. One of Sobieraj and Berry's key findings was that, "Outrage thrives in a narrowcasting environment."[315]

21. Homophily is the sociological term corresponding to the saying "Birds of a feather flock together." Pointing to a 2015 Pew Research Center study revealing that the average Facebook user has five politically like-minded friends for every one from the opposing end of the spectrum,[319] like Massachs *et al.* (2020), Samantha Power takes note of the combination of social media and homophily's self-reinforcing impact on our perceived world writing, "The information that comes to us has increasingly been tailored to appeal to our prior prejudices, and it is unlikely to be challenged by the like-minded with whom we interact day-to-day."[320]
22. The 2001 reference is to an earlier edition of Sunstein's Republic.com. An updated chapter on cybercascades may be found in his Republic.com 2.0 (2007).[325]
23. Hume argued that democracy in city-states of ancient Greece failed because in small cities, sentiments could rapidly spread in the population, meaning agitators were "more likely to succeed in sweeping aside the old order". Madison responded to this threat of tyrannical majority factions unified by a shared sentiment in Federalist paper number 10 with the argument (Robison's paraphrase): "In an extensive country, distance immunizes citizens from the contagion of passions and hinders their coordination even when passions are shared."[324] Robison thinks this portion of Madison's argument is obsolete due to the near instantaneous social media sharing of sentiments wherever we are due to the commonplace use of wirelessly connected handheld devices.
24. Giroux notes that "Trump is not Hitler in that he has not created concentration camps, shut down the critical media or rounded up dissidents; moreover, the United States at the current historical moment is not the Weimar Republic."[369] Tarizzo writes that both paleofascism and new fascism undermine the fundamentals of modern democracy, but the new mode of fascism "does not do this by absolutizing popular sovereignty at the expense of individual rights. New fascism celebrates our freedoms and absolutizes human rights to the detriment of our sense of belonging to a social-political community."[22]
25. For a wide ranging review and critique of the use of the term *fascist* to describe Trump as of late 2017, see Carl Boggs' postscript chapter in his book *Fascism Old and New*.[372]
26. Consider the titles of papers listed in Koch, Lars; Nanz, Tobias; Rogers, Christina, eds. (2020). "The Great Disruptor". *The Great Disruptor—Über Trump, die Medien und die Politik der Herabsetzung* (http://www.oapen.org/download/?type=document&docid=1007339). doi:10.1007/978-3-476-04976-6 (https://doi.org/10.1007%2F978-3-476-04976-6). ISBN 978-3476049759. S2CID 226426921 (https://api.semanticscholar.org/CorpusID:226426921).
27. Yale's Jason Stanley observed that while Trump is not a fascist, "I think you could legitimately call Trumpism a fascist social and political movement" and that "he's using fascist political tactics. I think there's no question about that. He is calling for national restoration in the face of humiliations brought on by immigrants, liberals, liberal minorities, and leftists. He's certainly playing the fascist playbook."[380] Philosopher Cornel West agrees that Trump has fascist proclivities and claims his popularity signals that neo-fascism is displacing neoliberalism in the United States.[381] Harvard historian Charles Clavey thinks the authors of the Frankfurt School (Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno and Herbert Marcuse) who studied the sudden victory of fascism in Germany offer the best insights into Trumpism. These similarities include the rhetoric of self-aggrandizement, victimhood, accusation, and his solicitation of unconditional support to return the country from moral and political decay.[332]
28. David Livingstone Smith, a scholar of history, psychology and anthropology, compares Trump and the fascist pattern of persuasion described by Roger Money-Kyrle, who witnessed fascist rallies in 1930s Germany. The psychological linkage between the leader and supporters in mass protests, the melancholia-paranoia-megalomania pattern, recitation of shared domestic dreads, promotion of fear-mongering conspiracy theories painting out-groups as the cause of the problems, simplified solutions presented in absolute terms and the promotion of singular leader capable of returning the country to its former greatness.[383]

29. Described as "the sociologist who studied Trump's base before Trump",[384] Michael Kimmel examined the relationship between masculinity and radicalization of pre-Trump supporters. In his 2018 book *Healing from Hate: How Young Men Get Into—and Out of—Violent Extremism* Kimmel describes a theme he "came to call 'aggrieved entitlement', a sense of righteous indignation, of undeserved victimhood in a world suddenly dominated by political correctness. The rewards these white men felt had been promised for a lifetime of, as they saw it, playing by the rules that someone else had established had suddenly dried up—or, as they saw it, the water had been diverted to far less deserving 'others'" who "were not worthy of the rewards they were now reaping, because 'they' were not 'real men.'"[385]
30. Quotes are from Brian Rosenwald, described as "a Harvard scholar who tracks disinformation in talk radio."[388]

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b. Attributed to multiple sources:[11][91][355][356][357][358][359][16][17][18][19][20][23][24][25][26][89][353][354][14][22][360][361]
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